

THE MARKS OF A MATURE PERSON
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 1 of 15
Overview of James

Student Outline: Excerpts by Rick Warren, Saddleback Christian Church

Without a doubt, probably the number one cause of problems in the world is immaturity. I have counseled hundreds of couples regarding marriage. The number one marriage problem is people just need to grow up. They are acting immature. We get ourselves into all kinds of problems by saying immature things, making immature decisions, acting in immature ways. We just need to grow up.

God's will for every person is that they grow. In Hebrews 6:1, *"Let us go on to maturity."* God says grow up. That's why one of the purposes of our church is to help everybody grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally, in every way and have balanced Christian living. What is maturity? How do know when you have arrived?

WHAT MATURITY IS NOT:

Maturity is not age. It has nothing to do with how long you've lived or how long you've been a Christian. You can be a Christian for fifty years and not be mature. Bumper sticker: "I may be getting older, but I refuse to grow up." I've seen some 50 and 60 year old kids. Maturity has nothing to do with your age. Granted, God's ideal is that as we grow older we get more mature, but that's not always the case.

Maturity is not appearance. Some people just look mature. Some people just look more spiritual than the rest of us. They look kind of dignified, they look like they're holy. For the rest of us it's just tough luck. The fact is, you can look real spiritual and not be spiritual at all. It has nothing to do with your appearance.

Maturity has nothing to do with achievement, what you accomplish. You can accomplish a lot and still be very immature. You don't have to be mature to make millions.

Maturity has nothing to do with academics, how many degrees you've gotten, how much education you've gotten. When I graduated from high school I thought I knew it all, then I went to college. I thought, "I don't know so much any more". Then I went to seminary and got a master's degree and went on toward a doctorate and now I don't think I know much at all. You can have so many degrees they call you Dr. Fahrenheit but that does not make you mature.

God says maturity is attitude. Attitude is what makes the difference. It's your character. D. L. Moody said, "Character is what you are in the dark." Recognition is what people say about you, character is what God says about you. God says it's your attitude that determines whether you're mature or not. God wants you to grow up and have Christlike attitudes.

How do you measure spiritual maturity? Not by comparing yourself to other people but by comparing yourself to the word of God. In the book of James we have a manual on maturity. The word "mature" in Greek is the word "teleaos" -- it's translated mature, complete, perfect.

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James uses this word five times in five chapters. James is a manual on how to be mature. James gives us five marks of maturity.

1. A MATURE PERSON IS POSITIVE UNDER PRESSURE

James 1:2-4 *"Consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance and perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything."*

How do you handle trials? The first test of maturity is how do you react to problems? Do they blow you away? Do you get nervous, uptight, negative? Do you grumble and gripe? How do you handle problems?

Christianity is a life. It's not a religion, it's a life. Jesus said, *"I've come that you might have life."* Life means problems, and part of life means solving problems and facing them with the right attitude.

What is your natural attitude, your natural bent when things don't go right and you're irritated? Are you negative or are you positive? Are you basically a supportive person or are you a skeptical person? Is your life filled with gratitude or grumbling? Are you affirmative or are you angry most of the time?

James says, *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."* You can be great in the knowledge of the Bible and be cantankerous as all get out! Are you positive under pressure?

2. A MATURE PERSON IS SENSITIVE TO PEOPLE

"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' you are doing right." James 2:8

A mature person is sensitive to people. He doesn't just see his own needs, he sees other people's needs. He understands their hurts. He's not just interested in himself. My children, when they're immature, only see themselves, "I want that, I want this, I don't care about anybody else." God says that love, being interested in others, is a mark of maturity.

James gets very specific. James 2:1-6: Don't show favoritism, don't be a snob, don't look down on people, don't judge by appearance, don't insult people, don't exploit people. The second test of maturity is love: how do you treat other people?

Paul said, "I may win all kinds of people to the Lord, I may build great church buildings, I may be on television, I may give my money to the poor, but if I have not love, I'm as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; it just doesn't amount to much".

Matthew 25, Jesus says, "At that judgement they will stand before the Lord and they'll say, 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was naked and you clothed

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me, I was sick and in prison and you visited me.' We'll say, 'When, Lord, when did we do that? When were you sick and we visited you? When were you in prison and when were you thirsty and we gave you drink?' Jesus said, 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto Me.'" It's interesting to me that in the Matthew 25 judgement the one thing we'll be judged for is how we treated other people. Not how many Bible verses we knew, how many times we were in church, not how great a reputation we had as Christian leaders, but how we treated other people.

3. A MATURE PERSON HAS MASTERED HIS MOUTH

James 3:2 *"We all stumble in many ways. (This is an understatement! Nobody's perfect.) If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."*

The first thing a doctor will say when you go for a check up is "Stick out your tongue." He uses your tongue to check your health. God does that spiritually, too.

In World War II there was a saying, "Loose lips, sink ships." Loose lips destroy lives. They hurt! Definition of gossip: hearing something you like about somebody you don't. It is mouth-to-mouth recitation.

Self-control comes from tongue control. We get ourselves into so much trouble at what we say and what we think and what we speak. James 3 gives several illustrations. He says our tongue is like a rudder, a bit in a horse's mouth, a spark, a snake, a spring. He says that you put a little bit in a horse's mouth and that little bit can control the direction of the horse. A little rudder on a boat can control the direction of the boat. Your tongue, which, by size is very insignificant, controls your life. What you say directs your life, what you say can destroy your life. It can delight people's lives, it can discourage people's lives. Your tongue is a powerful force for good or for evil.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I just say what's on my mind." They're kind of proud of it. Being frank, up front, they say what's on their mind. Maybe there's not a whole lot on their mind. Maybe what's on their mind shouldn't be said. The Bible says, that that's not frankness, that's immaturity. A lot of people just need a large dose of tactfulness.

Ephesians 4:29 *"Do not let any negative talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs..."* Circle the word "any". Watch what you say. When you talk you don't just say things to build yourself up. You say things to build other people up. If it doesn't build somebody else up, don't say it. Even if it's the truth. If it doesn't build up, don't say it. That's a mark of maturity. A mature person manages his mouth. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, if you can't master your mouth, you've missed the point.

James 1:26 *"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."* If I've memorized a hundred thousand verses and been through every Bible study in the book and go to church and never miss a service, but if I'm a gossip, my religion is worthless. If I spread rumors, it's worthless. If I'm always

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saying things that are not always accurate or exaggerate or speak impulsively, it's worthless. The test of maturity is to manage your mouth so that no corrupt communication, no negative talk comes out of your mouth.

"Speak the truth in love" means the right attitude, the right timing, the right place, the right location, the right motive. The Bible is very practical. It doesn't matter how much you know about the Bible, if your attitude isn't like Christ's you're missing the point.

IV. A MATURE PERSON IS A PEACEMAKER NOT A TROUBLEMAKER

James 4:1 *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"* He's talking about conflict. He says there are inner quarrels and fights and they come from our own inner desires. You want something and you don't get it. You kill and covet but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight and you do not have because you do not ask God.

Am I a peacemaker? Am I a troublemaker? Do I like to argue? Am I a contentious person? Do I get my feelings hurt? Do I get defensive easily? Do I hurt other people's feelings? Am I a peacemaker? Or am I a troublemaker?

The mark of a mature person is the lack of conflict in his own life. Paul told the Corinthian church, "You guys are a bunch of babies". They argued about everything. They argued about the Lord's Supper, gifts, leadership, everything. That's a mark of immaturity.

Why is there so much conflict in the world? Why is there conflict in my marriage? Why is there conflict where I work? Why is there conflict between me and a former friend? Why is there conflict between me and another Christian? Why is there conflict between me and God? Why is there conflict?

James says there are two reasons for conflict. James 4:3 *"When you ask you do not receive. But you ask with the wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* The first cause of conflict is selfishness. When I want what I want then I'm going to have conflict with somebody. The issue is pride. How do you know if a person is immature? Look at their prayers. If their prayers are always self-centered -- bless me, prosper me, protect me, use me, help me... if this is the only kind of prayer you pray, that's immature. Do you pray for other people? Bless me -- all I see is me. An "I" problem. Selfishness.

Pride guarantees conflict at work, church, home, school, wherever. Selfishness -- we want things for ourselves.

4:11-12 *"Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it... There is only one lawgiver and judge, one who is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbor?"* The other source of conflict is judging others -- judgementalism. All of us are guilty of judgementalism. God says,

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“Don't judge people”. If you do this you're asking for a fight. You're always finding fault, always stirring up strife, always spreading rumors. Don't judge!

Why? Why should I not judge?

1. I'm not God. When you judge somebody it's playing God. There is only one judge, only one lawgiver -- God.
2. Only God has all the facts, you don't and neither do I. When I judge you, I don't have all the facts.
3. I don't know the motives, and you don't either. You can't tell what's in somebody's heart. You don't know. Only God does.

So only God has the right to judge. He has all the facts, He knows everything, He knows all the motives, He sees into our heart. He's got the truth so He can judge. But we are limited in our insight. We don't have any right to judge.

God says selfishness and judgementalism causes conflict. The fourth characteristic of a mature person is whether that person is a peacemaker or a troublemaker. God says judgmental people are immature.

V. A MATURE PERSON IS PATIENT AND PRAYERFUL

5:7,11 *"Be patient then, brothers, until the Lord's coming... As you know, we consider blessed those who persevere."* v. 16 *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* Circle "patient" and "prayer". God says the mark of a mature person is, he is patient and prayerful. Those are the two keywords in chapter five. "Patient" is used four times. "Prayer" is used seven times. The mark of a mature person is they are patient and they are prayerful. Those two go together. They express an attitude of dependence upon God.

5:7 *"Be patient then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, how patient he is for the fall and spring rain. You too be patient. Stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged."* He's saying, “Be patient.” He gives the illustration of the farmer. If anybody has to have patience it's a farmer. He does a lot of waiting. He plants a seed, waits, prays, hopes, expects ... he waits. There are no overnight crops. Just like a farmer has to wait, sometimes we have to wait. We have to wait on God in answer to prayer. We have to wait on God for a miracle. We have to wait on God to work in our lives. We have to wait. Patience is a mark of maturity. The only way you learn patience is by waiting.

My children had to learn the difference between "No" and "Not yet". For a long time they thought that "not yet" meant "we're not going to get to do it". They thought it meant “No”-- it just meant “Not yet”. Many times God will say to you, "Not yet." He doesn't mean "No". He doesn't mean He's not going to answer your prayer. He just saying, “You've got to wait, I want you to develop, to grow”.

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5:16 *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crop."* If anybody was patient it was Elijah. Elijah was patient and prayerful. That's a mark of maturity.

What are the tests?

1. How do you handle problems? Do you get uptight, negative, grumble, gripe, complain or are you positive under pressure?
2. Are you sensitive to other people? Are you concerned about their needs, desires, cares, hurts, or do you only see yourself? Do you only pray for yourself or do you pray for others?
3. Can you manage your mouth? Have you learned to put a muzzle on it sometimes and just not speak? When you have a juicy tidbit of gossip and it's tempting because knowledge is power, do you share it -- "... so you can pray about it." You can damage people just by innuendo. Managing your mouth is a mark of maturity. ("Have you learned, like Ephesians says, "Let no corrupt communication, no corrupt talk come out of your mouth, but only that which builds up for the edification of others according to their needs.")
4. Are you a troublemaker or are you a peacemaker? Do you have a tendency to stir things up? Do you have a hair trigger temper where someone can tick you off quickly? Do you carry a grudge? Do you find yourself nursing a bitterness? Or are you a peacemaker?
5. How long can you wait for an answer to prayer without giving up? Maybe God has every intention of giving it but He's waiting to teach you maturity.

Prayer:

In this moment of quietness before we close with a word of prayer, let's do a little personal evaluation. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. It matters what God thinks about you. I can fool you and I can fool others. You can fool me and you can fool others. But none of us can fool God. He knows exactly what's in our heart. God says to you, "How do you rate your maturity? Are you positive under pressure?" Some of you need to pray, "God, will You change my attitude? Will You change me from an attitude of griping to an attitude of gratefulness?" Some of you need to pray "God, will You help me handle the problems in life and not be negative about them, not let them get me down? Teach me to be positive under pressure." Are you sensitive to others? Some of you need to say, "Lord, please forgive me. I've been insensitive to my wife. She talks, I tune her out. I read the paper, watch TV. I don't even listen because I don't think she has anything to say. I'm too caught up in my own world to care about her world." Some of you need to say, "Lord, please forgive me for being insensitive to my kids. Help me to realize that they are just kids. Help me to quit expecting them to act mature when I don't even act mature all the time. Help me to be sensitive to their hurts and needs and problems." Some of you wives need to say, "Lord help me to be sensitive to my husband and the pressures that he's undergoing right now at work, the difficulties he's handling. I don't experience them so I take it for granted.

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Help me not to load more on him when he comes home, but to find the right time and right way to share." Have you learned to master your mouth? Some of you need to say, "God, I'm sorry. I've been a gossip. I've spread rumors. I've talked behind backs. I've shared things that were not positive, were not for the building up but for the tearing down. God, help me to not be so impulsive with my mouth. Lord, I know You said if I can't control my mouth, my religion is worthless. Help me to watch my speech and only speak that which builds up." Are you a peacemaker instead of a troublemaker? "God, you know I've got a temper and I ask You to help me with it. You know I've got pride in my life, help me with it. Lord, you know how easy it is for me to judge other people. Help me to realize that all that's going to do is to cause conflict and stir up strife. Help me to realize that You are God and I'm not to play God. I don't have all the facts and know all the motives. Help me to leave that judgement to You." Are you patient and prayerful about life? Some of you have been waiting a long time for an answer, for a change, for a healing. Say, "God, help me to grow in patience. Help me to develop my prayer life, to talk to You more, to show my dependence on You by talking to You about every area of my life. Make me a patient and prayerful person."

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your word, for this book of James that is such a practical manual on Christian living. Thank You that it deals not with theory, but with areas that all of us need to work on -- our attitudes, our actions, our words, our thoughts, our relationships. Help us to mature, to grow up, to be more like You. In Jesus' name. Amen